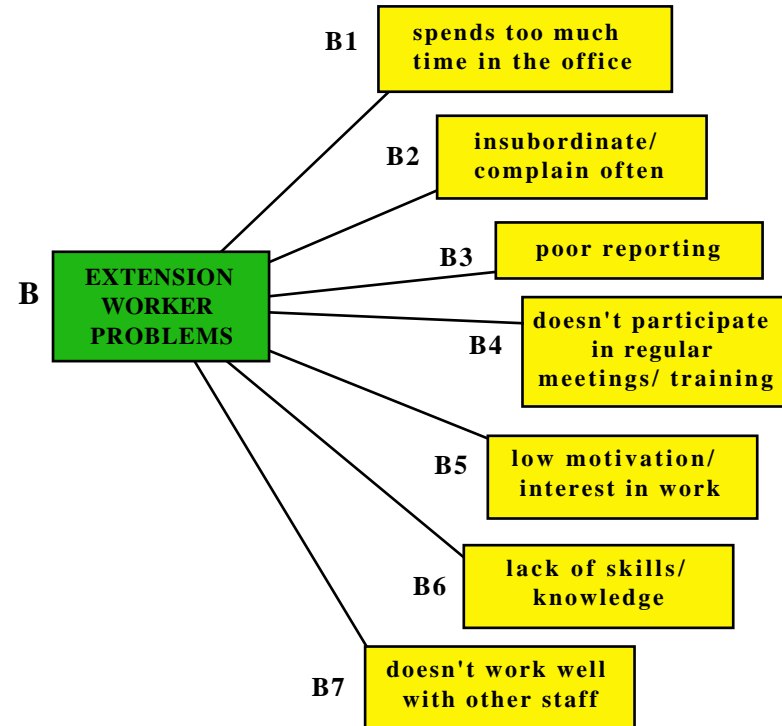




B: EXTENSION WORKER PROBLEMS

A major category of problems faced by extension managers refers to issues related to management of extension workers. Motivating demoralised staff, encouraging staff to spend adequate time in the field, ensuring a proper balance of office and field activities, are just a few of the numerous problems faced. Many of these issues have implications for the overall effectiveness of field operations.





B1 spend too much time in the office

Extension workers sometimes spend too much time in the office to be able to be effective in their field responsibilities. Before deciding to increase pressure on them to spend more time in the field, it is worth looking at whether this has any effect on implementation of field activities. If they are implemented successfully and according to schedule, is it a problem if they spend a lot of time in the office? The constant presence of field workers at the office may just be because they have become better organised. Alternatively, if all activities are completed on target, the objectives of the service may be under ambitious and more could be achieved with the existing resources.

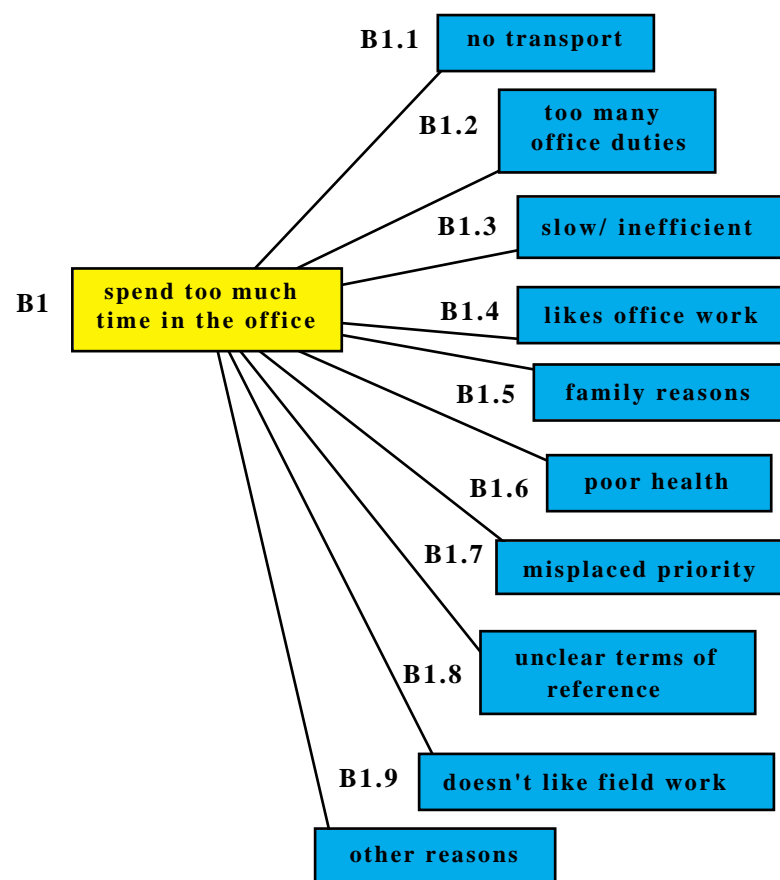
More often, however, their excessive presence in the office is a symptom of discomfort with field activities which could be due to a range of reasons. In investigating the reasons, it is usually a good approach to begin by informally bringing up the issue with the field worker to try to find out where the problem lies.

Questions which need to be answered include:

- is there evidence of the field work being affected negatively?
- are there complaints from villagers?
- has anything changed which may have caused the reduction of the field presence?
- have similar changes been noticed in other field workers?

Some of the reasons given may at first sight seem impossible to be dealt with, e.g. lack of vehicles to be used by field staff. The manager should then look at alternative or less conventional ways to get round the problem or improve the situation wherever possible. For example, in the case of lack of transport, it might

be possible to suggest a revision of the schedule to minimise travelling between villages, or rearrange locations and days for the meetings, to suit both local people and field workers' needs and make best use of public transport.





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.1 no transport

Suggestions

Lack of transport due to actual lack of vehicles or broken vehicles or lack of fuel is a commonly stated problem in extension work. However, budgets are always limited and there may be other options to help get round this problem.

- could public transport be used until funds are available to buy fuel/repair vehicle/provide vehicle?
- could extension staff be moved nearer to field work?
- could areas of responsibilities be rearranged according to the field worker living nearer to it?
- could field visits be better scheduled to share existing transport?
- could alternative locations for meetings/activities be found which could suit villagers and be more easily reachable for field staff?
- could schedules be better organised to minimise travelling between villages?
- could more use be made of other communication methods, group methods?
- is existing transport being used for other tasks? What are the priorities?

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.2 too many office duties

Suggestions

Too many office duties such as paper work and meetings can reduce the time available for field work. This may actually be a matter of inefficiency in completing paper work or in conducting meetings rather than too much work. In either case there are ways to reduce the time spent on administrative office work.

- review priorities?
- could paperwork required be reduced? Could more use be made of summary reports?
- could better use be made of existing administrative staff?
- could number of meetings be reduced/ more efficient use be made of them?
- do staff need training on report writing?

See also **B3 poor reporting**

and **B1.3 slow/inefficient**

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.3 slow/inefficient

Suggestions

- consider setting deadlines for completion of work?
- consider increasing frequency of reporting?
- consider use of incentives such as competitions, bonuses etc.?

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.4 likes office work

Suggestions

- review schedules - discuss need for more emphasis on field work?
- consider moving to more administrative position?

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.5 family reasons

Suggestions

- consider moving area of field responsibilities?
- consider changing job responsibilities?

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.6 poor health

Suggestions

- consider what could be done to improve his/her health (assist with medical treatment?)
- consider changing job responsibilities?
- consider moving area of field responsibilities?

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.7 misplaced priority

Suggestions

- review expectations with extension worker
- see also B1.8 unclear terms of reference

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

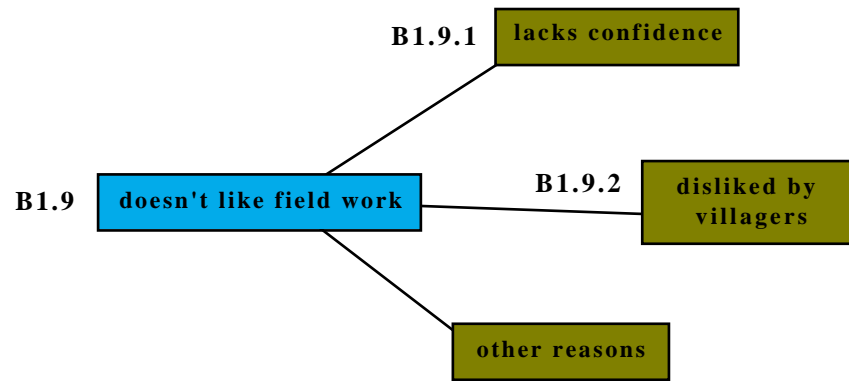
B1.8 unclear terms of reference

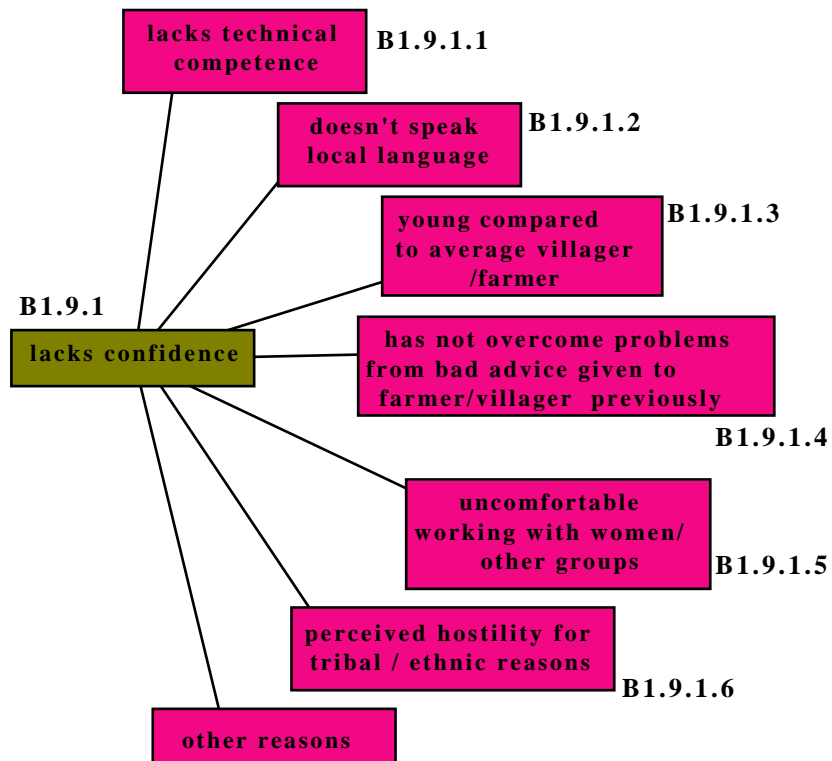
Suggestions

- prepare written terms of reference and review them with extension worker? Consider also extension worker and villager involvement in preparing the terms of reference. Consider asking extension worker to prepare own draft terms of reference in consultation with villagers? Review these and modify as necessary to comply with other needs of the service?

- other suggestions







Reasons for lack of confidence need to be investigated further. Apart from lack of experience which can only really be overcome with time, perhaps working together with a colleague initially, there can be many reasons for lack of confidence and the action to be taken will depend on the underlying reasons for the lack of confidence. In all cases, the issue should first be raised with the extension worker and their suggestions heard. Team building exercises and mutual support between extension staff can also be useful to build confidence in staff.

See also issues under **C3.5 lack of confidence (manager)** and **A4.4 villagers not willing to share information**





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.9.1.1 lacks technical competence

Suggestions

- if actually lacks technical competence - may need to provide skills training
- if lack of knowledge, may need further education, or consider whether appropriate for the particular post. Is the job itself clear?
- if lack of experience, the problem may be temporary - does the situation improve with time?
- is the extension worker actually competent but not good in communication skills? Consider communications training

See also

A1.1.2.6.1.1 extension worker poor communication skills

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.9.1.2 doesn't speak language

Suggestions

- provide interpreters - preferably those local to the area who speak both the local language and the advisors language?
Could it be one of the villagers?
- rely more on demonstrations and visual aids?
- provide opportunities for staff member to learn the local language?
- consider transfer to another area?

See also

A1.1.2.6.1.1
poor extension worker communication/demonstration skills

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.9.1.3 young compared to average villager/client

Suggestions

Youthfulness can be a problem in that older people may have little respect for advice from a younger person. Respect would need to be gained through competence and by acting as a facilitator rather than telling villagers how to do activities.

See A1.1.2.6.1.1
poor extension worker communication/demonstration skills

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.9.1.4 has not overcome problems due to previous wrong advice

Suggestions

How easy this problem is to overcome will depend on the damage done from previous wrong advice. Any damage may need to be compensated for, or confidence regained by providing better and correct advice in future. It may also be that eventually this will result in a better extension worker as s/he recognises that s/he is not always right.

- provide moral support/back up for the extension worker with the villagers?
- help him/her becoming more confident by praising good results?
- if s/he is particularly competent in one area give him/her a task related to it (e.g. if s/he knows all about beekeeping, s/he could give a short seminar to colleagues)?
- if lack of confidence is related to weak skills/knowledge in one area, suggest sending him/her on a short course?

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.9.1.5 uncomfortable working with women/other groups

Suggestions

- work together with another extension worker with the women's group/other group initially?
- provide moral support/back up for the extension worker with the womens group/other group?
- if difficulty cannot be overcome, consider transfer to another area or to other duties?

- other suggestions





Problem: (too much time in office)

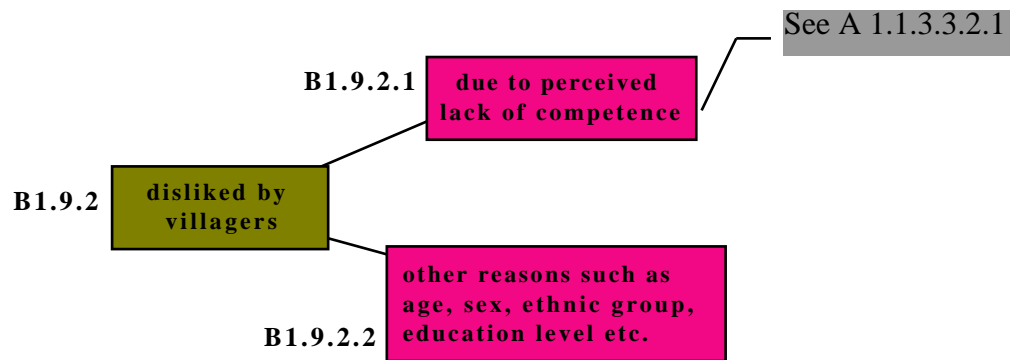
B1.9.1.6 perceived hostility for tribal/ethnic reasons

Suggestions

- provide moral support/back up for the extension worker with the villagers?
- if hostility genuine and cannot be overcome, consider transfer to another area or to other duties?

- other suggestions





See also

B1.9.1.6 perceived hostility for tribal/ethnic reasons





Problem: (too much time in office)

B1.9.2.2 disliked by villagers (reasons other than lack of competence)

Suggestions

- provide moral support/back up for the extension worker with the villagers?
- if the extension worker's age, sex or lack of experience are the reason for 'dislike', demonstrating usefulness of advice is likely to be the only way to increase attendance.
- if ethnic reasons, religion differences etc. are the reason, there may be no alternative other than to move the field worker to another area or other duties.

- other suggestions

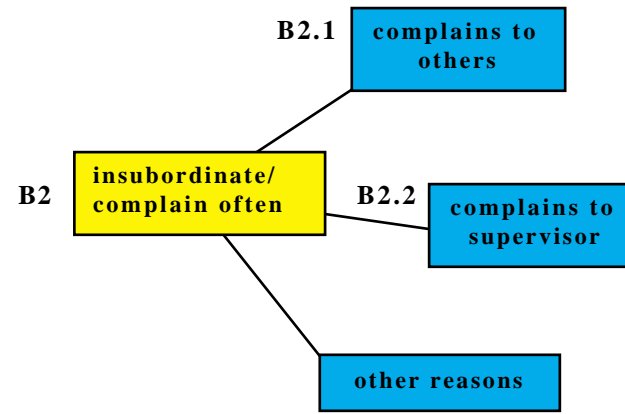




B 2 insubordinate/complains often

A member of staff who frequently complains or who doesn't follow guidelines and advice can be a disruptive presence within the team. Ignoring the problem is not going to improve the situation, neither is trying to recommend his/her dismissal. As with most of the problems discussed in this guide, it would be advisable to try to find the underlying reasons for this behaviour. Discussing the issue, possibly informally, with the field staff concerned could be a good opportunity to understand the situation and improve relationships. Separate informal discussions with other field workers can also be helpful, according to the specific situation. Only in extreme cases, and after other possibilities have been tried out, should disciplinary action be considered.

When complaints are made to colleagues and other members of staff action is more urgently required, since it can more easily get out of control. Efforts should initially be made to redirect the flow of complaints to the supervisor's level. In this case, a common platform to discussing the problem will have been established and it will be easier to analyse the problems.





Problem: (insubordination)

B2.1 complains to others

Suggestions

- consider holding a general meeting & ask all members of staff to direct all problems/complaints to the supervisor, not to other staff?
- set up anonymous 'suggestion box'?
- hold regular staff meetings and social events?
- deal with complaints as quickly as possible?
- consider discussing the problem informally with individual members of staff?
- discuss the problem separately with the field worker concerned?
- if problem continues, consider disciplinary action?

- other suggestions





Problem: (insubordination)

B2.1 complains to supervisor

Suggestions

- deal with complaints promptly where valid?
- ask extension worker for suggestions how to deal with the problem?
- consider disciplinary actions if authority undermined?

Provided complaints are made directly to the supervisor, this problem can be dealt with by a combination of dealing with valid complaints and dismissing others - or asking what the extension worker might do. Disciplinary measures should not be used to prevent complaints being made to the supervisor as this is likely to result in the complaints being made to others which can undermine discipline more easily.

- other suggestions



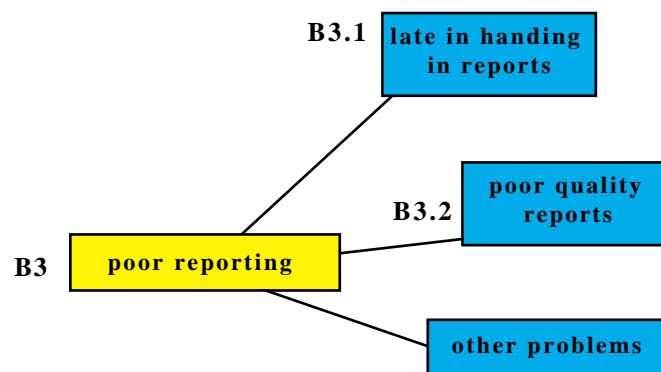


B3 poor reporting

Regular records and a good reporting system ensure that the extension manager is aware of progress and problems in the field and can therefore take appropriate action. When reports are handed in late or are of poor quality, the understanding and monitoring of the field situation is affected and managers may fail to implement the required action in a timely way. If, however, reports are not taken seriously by management, the staff cannot be expected to take them seriously either. In investigating the reasons for poor reports, key issues to consider are:

- is the field worker aware of the deadlines?
- has a standard for the reports been set? is the field worker aware of it? does s/he understand it?
- is the report late/of poor quality because of carelessness or because of lack of skills?
- does the same problem occur with other field staff?
- is the usefulness and use of reports clear?
- is the reporting system too time-consuming? Or too superficial?

If this is a problem confined to one extension worker, the example of others can be used to show what can be done and what is expected. Standards need to be maintained consistently for all staff if reports are not to deteriorate for all staff in terms of timing and quality. Late reports can often mean actions are not taken in time.





Problem: (poor reporting)

B3.1 late in handing in reports

Suggestions

- review amount of paperwork expected? is it all necessary?
- review priorities - office work/ field work?
- consider acceptability of briefer summary reports?
- discuss reasons for late reports - are there outside factors, is this a temporary problem? Or is this only a problem in some situations?
- compare to other staff reports?
- set deadlines?

- other suggestions





Problem: (poor reporting)

B3.2 poor quality reports

Suggestions

- compare the reports to other staff members reports? Are they lower standards? Do all staff need to improve their reporting or is this a problem for a particular staff member? If only for a particular staff member, showing him/her other reports may be enough to set a standard expected.
- give example of format/quality expected?
- prepare brief guidelines for report preparation?

Guidelines for reporting need not be lengthy or complex. The shorter and clearer they are, the higher the chances of them being used and followed. They should be one or two pages, containing the headings required in the report, and a brief description (a paragraph or two) of what each section should contain (details required and suggested length of the section). An example of a good report would also help make the point more clearly.

Poor quality reports may mean inadequate detail, badly written or poor presentation. A standard needs to be maintained that all staff are expected to keep to. However, how high a standard is needed depends on the purpose of the reports. Are they adequate for the purpose to which they are to be put? If so is 'poor reporting' a problem?

- other suggestions





B4 doesn't participate in regular meetings/training

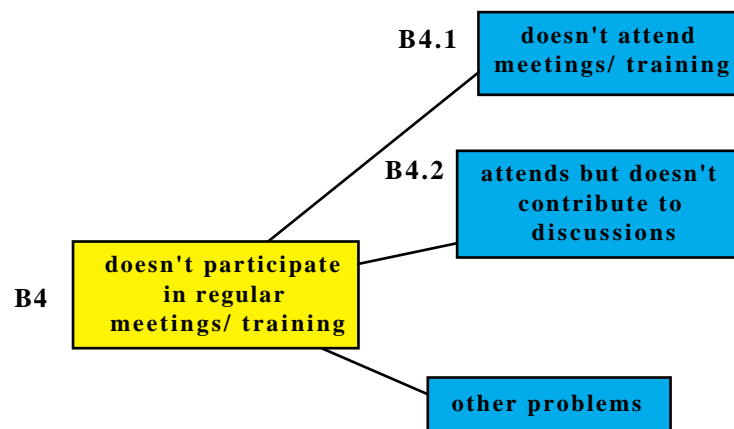
Good communication between the extension manager and the field workers as well as among the field staff, are prerequisites for successful extension activities. Exchanging experiences from the different areas of responsibilities should be encouraged as it ensures that learning is maximised, mistakes repeated less often and successful examples promoted. When an extension worker does not attend meetings, or, if s/he does, does not contribute to the discussion and does not share views and experiences, it prevents the rest of the team from learning from examples from their area. It also means that the manager has a reduced understanding of the situation. For the extension workers themselves by not exposing problems faced, they do not benefit from the experience and problem solving skills of the team.

In investigating the reasons for lack of participation, issues to consider should include:

- is the problem confined to one field worker or more?
- is there regular or only occasional lack of participation?
- can any reasons be identified from past experiences/situations (e.g., one field worker starts not attending meetings after having had an argument with a colleague during a session)?

In the case of a field worker not attending sessions, it is advisable to discuss the problem directly with him/her. In the case of low participation it might be better to first try to encourage each field worker to contribute during the meetings before discussing the issue directly in a separate meeting.

Many of these issues of participation in planning of extension work and how freely extension workers can voice opinions and make contributions may also be relevant to meetings with villagers. See also **A4 poor participation of local people**





Problem: (non participation)

B4.1 doesn't attend meetings/training

Suggestions

lack of attendance at meetings or training activities may be due to a number of reasons including lack of time through too many other duties, lack of transport or that meetings are not considered a priority or not useful to the extension worker's main duties. The staff member may also be afraid of appearing incompetent or lazy and not wish to be criticised.

- consider reviewing priorities in meeting of extension staff?
- reschedule meetings/training to more convenient time/place?
- arrange transport?
- reduce frequency of meetings?
- encourage constructive and discourage destructive criticism during meetings?

- other suggestions





Problem: (non-participation)

B4.2 attends meetings but does not contribute to discussions

Suggestions

- encourage participants to contribute their opinions?
- use buzz sessions/ snowball/ small groups to encourage everybody to contribute?
- if one person dominates discussion, stress the need for contribution from all staff and encourage others?
- ask for verbal reports/specific contribution from each extension worker?
- discuss privately with extension worker reasons for lack of motivation?

See also B5 low motivation/interest in work

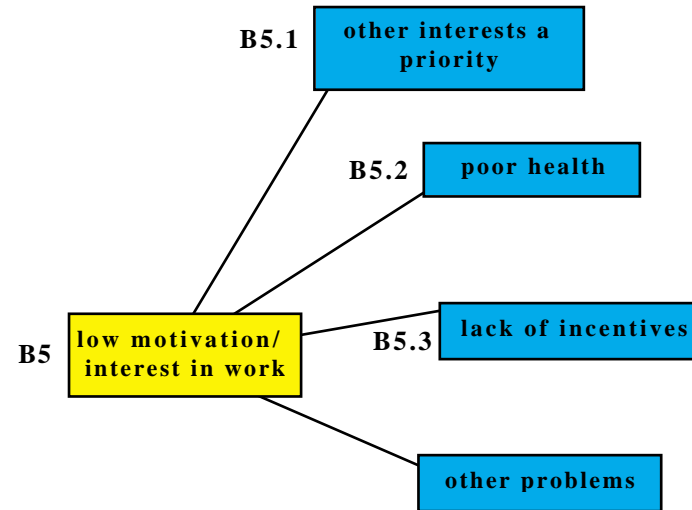
- other suggestions





B 5 low motivation/interest in work

A frequent problem in extension services is low motivation and low commitment of field staff. Though this is often linked to limited incentives, limited authority and accountability and low pay, other problems, such as health or family issues can bring about the same effect. Identifying the underlying issue may not be easy since motivation problems are often due to a range of interrelated issues rather than one specific point. Also, whether consciously or not, a cause may be hidden behind other problems. To be able to plan effective corrective action, it is as important to identify which are the aspects which would lead to higher motivation. For example, while it may be that limited promotion prospects are a general cause of low motivation, increasing job satisfaction may also have a significant impact.





Problem: (low motivation)

B5.1 other interests a priority

Suggestions

Other interests may include family and friends as well as other work. While staff cannot be expected to work all their waking hours on extension work, the work should not suffer through other aspects of their lives taking up their work time.

- move extension worker nearer to work/further from distractions?
- consider whether suited to the work?
- allocate more time to the aspects of the work which do interest the staff member?
- see also [B5.3 lack of incentives](#)

- other suggestions





Problem: (low motivation)

B5.2 poor health

Suggestions

- allocate more time to aspects of the work which are practical and enjoyed?
- consider what could be done to improve his/her health (assist with medical treatment?)
- allocate more administrative tasks relieving pressure from others?
- consider transfer to more suitable post?
- also see B1 spend too much time in office

- other suggestions





Problem: (low motivation)

B5.3 lack of incentives

Suggestions

- consider increasing where possible the number of activities with specific objectives to increase sense of achievement?
- review pay, promotion and job security with senior staff?
- consider increasing social events for improved morale/teamwork?

If a job has low pay, poor promotion and little security, the other rewards in terms of job satisfaction need to be much higher. Social interaction between staff, a sense of achievement through setting achievable specific objectives and flexibility in allowing staff responsibility for their own work can all help to achieve this. In some extreme situations, however, the manager will have to be tolerant of the time spent on extension activities compared to other interests. Good results can however still be expected even where extension workers do not work full time at extension work.

- other suggestions

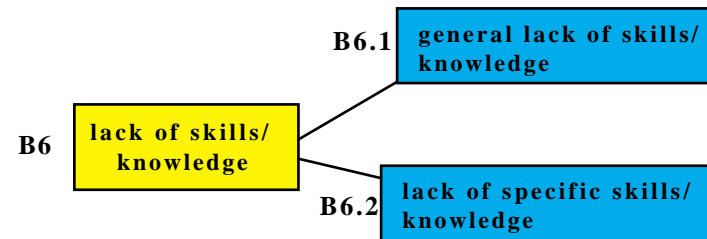




B 6 lack of skills/knowledge

It is often the case that extension staff are appointed to their posts with a low level of knowledge or skills because of inadequate education and training. Similarly, graduates may appear to have a reasonable theoretical knowledge but lack practical experience and skills. Where it is not possible to arrange specific in-service training courses to correct this, an alternative can be a type of apprenticeship scheme whereby the new extension workers are assigned to more experienced workers for a short period specifically to learn from and be supervised by them.

Refresher training courses (or in-service training) are generally also needed for all extension staff to ensure that they keep up to date with new skills and knowledge as they are needed.





Problem: (lack of skills/knowledge)

B6.1 general lack of skills/knowledge

Suggestions

- consider in-service training courses?
- if this is a general problem with all extension staff, consider alternative systems - using extension staff as intermediaries, as group facilitators (after suitable short course training), or greater use of rural people's groups and mass media for extension work?
- If specific staff lack skills and or knowledge, consider apprenticeship schemes as above, or special training as appropriate?

- other suggestions





Problem: (lack of skills/knowledge)

B6.2 lack of specific skills/knowledge

Suggestions

- if a general problem, could another service assist in this area?
- could in-service courses be arranged?
- could attachments/ field visits to other areas where staff have experience in this area be arranged?
- if the problem is for one or a few staff only, consider discussion in groups with more experienced staff in this area?
- consider attachments, training courses, field visits etc. for the staff concerned?
- consider allocating different duties to these staff? Stress team work, making use of the skills of different team members?
- encourage openness about skill/knowledge weakness so that measures can be taken?
- make use of strengths of local people as well as the 'subject matter specialists'?

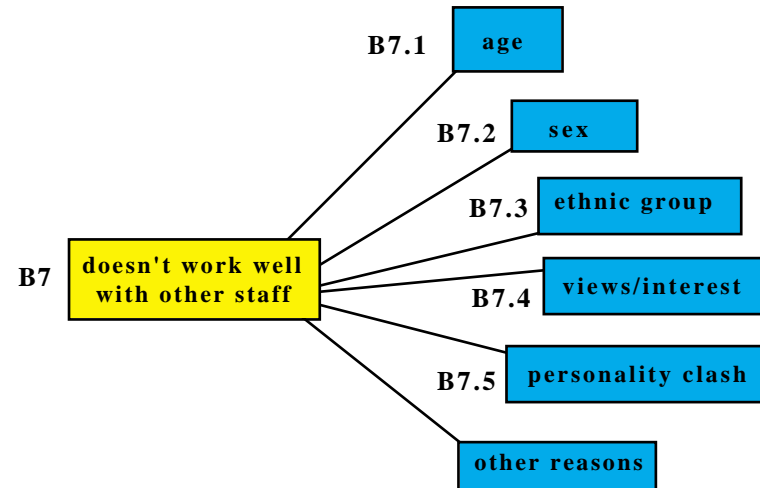
- other suggestions





B7 does not work well with other staff

Differences always exist between different staff and they may not necessarily find easy or enjoy working with each other. However, all staff have a common job to do and, when conflicts between individuals emerge, the manager needs to stress the need to work together for achieving the overall objectives. Over time, where sufficient efforts are put into developing a team, staff usually learn to work productively together. Where this is not the case, transfers may be needed. Developing a team however is a complex process and can depend to some extent on the relative status and authority of the team members. All members need to feel they are part of the decision making process rather than decisions being imposed from above if the team is to work well together.





Problem: (doesn't work well with other staff)

B7.1 age

Suggestions

- hold regular joint meetings with extension staff?
- hold meetings with smaller numbers of staff - if older staff are not the majority, the younger and older staff may learn to work better together?
- stress complementarity of staff?

Age differences may mean that extension staff have little in common to begin with. However, since they will all be expected to do the same job, by holding joint activities and meetings with small numbers of staff rather than large meetings, staff often learn to work better together. In some cases, younger staff may be better educated and with more up to date skills than older staff which can be a cause of friction. Older staff however have the benefit of experience and the stress needs to be on achieving extension objectives as a team in which all staff have something to contribute.

- other suggestions





Problem: (doesn't work well with other staff)

B7.2 different sexes

Suggestions

- if male and female staff cannot work together, consider separate activities/meetings?
- where one sex is a minority, consider holding meetings with small numbers of staff?
- consider gender and development training course?

- other suggestions





Problem: (doesn't work well with other staff)

B7.3 ethnic groups

Suggestions

- hold small group staff meetings for staff to get used to working together?
- discuss the issue individually with staff?
- consider transfers among different teams if problem is not resolved after some time (e.g. 6 months)?

- other suggestions





Problem: (doesn't work well with other staff)

B7.4 different views/interests

Suggestions

- organise activities which help team building?
- stress complementarity of staff?
- consider transfers among different teams if problem is not resolved after some time (e.g. 6 months)?

- other suggestions





Problem: (doesn't work well with other staff)

B7.5 personality clashes

Suggestions

- stress complementarity of staff?
- identify mutually disturbing behaviour and discuss with staff members concerned?
- stress need for professional behaviour in work?
- if clashes are extreme, transfers to a different team could be the only feasible solution.

- other suggestions

